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Special session of regional consultation prior to the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

26 January 2022 – Virtual session

As I mentioned at the inauguration of this meeting of the Presiding Officers, it is an honor for UN Women and me to initiate the special session of the Regional Consultation prior to the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

My warmest greetings to:

- María Cristina Perceval, Secretary for Equality and Diversity Policies of the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity of Argentina, in her capacity as Vice-Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and representative of the country holding the Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC).
- Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, whom I would especially like to thank for her presence today in this first encounter with Latin America and the Caribbean, which we hope will continue and be strengthened during her mandate.
- Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- Ministers and senior authorities of the mechanisms for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Representatives of feminist, women's, and civil society organizations.
- I would like to join our Executive Director in thanking Lorena Aguilar, Daniela Beltrame, and María del Pilar Medina for their work in preparing the background documents.

I would like to begin by highlighting the opportunity which the priority theme of the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes" provides us with as a fundamental milestone on the path towards building sustainable societies with women at the center, in line with what the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs outline for us.

The Latin American and Caribbean region has a powerful, diverse, and unique voice to contribute to the global debate to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental, and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.

The impact of the crisis continues to be evident, with disproportionate consequences for women and girls. We must continue to build comprehensive care systems, with concrete advances and proposals that we can present at the XV Regional Conference on Women. We must continue to move towards a care society that prioritizes care for the planet, health, people, and self-care, ultimately placing the sustainability of life at the center.

We also know that women are disproportionately affected by climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters for reasons directly related to gender inequality.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize the need to do everything in our power to protect women environmental defenders, especially indigenous women, and those on the ground, who are particularly vulnerable to the increasing threats and acts of violence against them. Much of this violence is gender-based and includes sexual violence, violence on social media networks, and threats against their life and their family.

According to information compiled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2021, Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the most dangerous region in the world for environmental defenders. Between 2015 and 2019, there were 933 murders in the region out of 1,323 reported worldwide. In the same period, 166 women environmental defenders were reported murdered. This is a figure that requires reflection. The region has the Escazú Agreement, which includes provisions on human rights defenders in environmental issues and its adoption and implementation with a gender perspective. I call on all countries in the region to ratify this agreement urgently.

Indigenous women and their organizations have played an active and sustained role over time in defense of territory, water, and nature, the key to environmental conservation, climate change adaptation, and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, indigenous women are responsible for ensuring food security in their communities, which is of vital importance for both climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction, where access to food, water, and energy sources is crucial for the affected populations.

I would like to present for your consideration some recommendations from UN Women.

It is crucial to ensure women's participation and leadership to improve policies and programmes related to climate change, environment, and disaster risk reduction. So far, most countries do not have legal and policy frameworks that comprehensively incorporate gender equality or ensure women's participation in decision-making.

It is also critical to secure a significant increase in funding to ensure climate stabilization and environmental sustainability with gender equality and care at the center. Governments can increase investments and resources for gender-inclusive climate, environmental, and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes by integrating them into economic planning and public investments.

Additionally, they can put in place progressive fiscal systems to expand fiscal space and implement gender-responsive budget and expenditure frameworks, with the participation of all ministries involved, including the Ministry of Women or relevant mechanisms.

The resilience of women and their communities to climate change and environmental and disaster risks needs to be strengthened to transform production and consumption patterns, promoting a transition to a low-carbon economy.

For this transformation of the economy to be possible, it is necessary to transform the care economy and social protection and health systems, as well as eliminate structural barriers and the closing of gender gaps in access to education, employment, information, and technology.

In the wake of the toll the pandemic has taken on the lives of millions of people, recovery must be driven by gender equality and care to build an economy that works for all people and the planet, leaving no one behind, and including communities, especially women, who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Despite some progress, significant gaps remain in gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data on climate, environmental, and disaster risk reduction across all sectors. This prevents us from adequately assessing vulnerabilities and the differentiated impact on women and girls, which in turn makes it difficult to design evidence-based programmes and policies focused on closing the gap. If we also add the disaggregation of other dimensions, such as age, ethnicity, or geographic location, among others, data availability is even scarcer.

I would also like to highlight the importance of investing in feminist and women's organizations that play a fundamental role in defending the rights of all women and girls for the transformation of our societies. We need to ensure that these organizations have access to multilateral climate funds and funding sources for environmental and biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction.

We still have a long way to go to ensure that the Agreed Conclusions of CSW66 unequivocally reflect progress for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in all their diversity, but particularly for those who are most vulnerable and excluded.

I trust in the leadership and political vision of the Ministers and authorities of the mechanisms for the advancement of women to conclude this Regional Consultation with the adoption of a Declaration that will carry the voice of Latin America and the Caribbean beyond our borders.



The women and girls of our region and the entire world will thank us for it.

Thank you very much.